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The Next Steps in Club Work

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THE NEXT STEPS IN CLUB WORK*

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Boys' and girls' 4-H club work is a going concern. Its membership has increased 8 to 10 per cent annually for the past several years. There are now over 800,000 enrolled. Nearly every agricultural paper in the country has a 4-H club department, and club work has more publicity than any other phase of extension. It is referred to as the hope of rural America -- a great rural educational movement, sound in conception, effective in its training, and accomplishing results.

A distinguished German, the director of the Institute of Agricultural Economics and Labor at Göttingen University, has recently spent six months in the United States, studying various phases of agriculture, traveling from coast to coast and north into Canada. When asked what was the most significant thing he saw in his studies, he replied, "Boys' and girls' club work." Thus is the disinterested outsider impressed with our extension work.

Increasingly, in our adult work, we are finding men and women on farms who were in boys' and girls' club work 12 to 16 years ago. Pretty generally these men and women are, as a matter of course, taking a prominent part in extension work, putting on demonstrations, acting as chairmen of committees, leading in community affairs. So we find boys' and girls' club work is already telling in our rural adult life.

This great educational movement has grown up without a great deal of concerted thought by administrative officers being given it. So far as I know, club leaders and extension directors have never met together in national conference to consider the objectives of club work. Relatively few agricultural college presidents or heads of departments of education have offered suggestions or given guidance in the conduct of boys' and girls' club work. Club leaders from all the States and the United States Department of Agriculture have given of their best to this work and largely made it what it is to-day.

*An address delivered at the convention of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Washington, D. C., November 17-19, 1930.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each director of extension, State agricultural college library, State experiment station library.

But, in a movement of such vast and increasing proportions, of such significance to all America, a movement of such possibilities to both rural and urban life, is not the time here when presidents of our agricultural colleges, heads of agricultural-college educational departments, extension directors, and club leaders both men and women, should all come together in national conference and give guidance to this growing movement? We need to have our objectives more fully and more clearly stated. We want to see more distinctly the road along which we are to travel, the end to be reached. We need the considered judgment of the best minds we have on this matter.

This, in our judgment, is the next step in boys' and girls' club work we ought to take and take soon -- something immediately before us -- to define our objectives, set out our goals, fit the work in with other educational agencies and movements, like the elementary and Smith-Hughes schools, so that it may supplement and strengthen efforts in these fields and result in a well-rounded educational program for the boys and girls of rural America.

Something of this is being accomplished at the present time. The relations between agencies, however, can be strengthened and a conference of the best minds of men and women, in sympathy with rural life and with vocational education, can help much in harmonizing the work of these separate agencies. College presidents and extension directors should join with State leaders in determining upon and epitomizing our club objectives.

It isn't enough to have just a 2 or 3-day conference of these leading men and women. That is just a start. Out of such a conference should come the appointment of committees that should study the matter for three months, or three years if need be, and give us, finally, clearly defined goals and set out the place in our educational system and rural life of this new, significant, and rapidly growing movement.

The Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities has had a committee studying for over 30 years the methods of teaching within college walls. Consideration should now be given to studying its teaching work outside school walls, including 4-H club work.

There are around 12,000,000 boys and girls of club age in rural United States. About 6,000,000 live on farms in the open country. It is important that we get the 4-H club message to this whole group of 12,000,000 boys and girls, or at least to the abler boys and girls of the group.

With modern farming efficiency, fewer and fewer people on the farms can grow all the food and fiber crops needed by the Nation. Twenty-five to thirty-five per cent of our farm boys and girls now, probably a larger percentage in years to come, must seek employment in urban centers. In this group of boys and girls who seek their fortunes in the towns and cities are many of the future merchants, bank presidents, railroad managers, lawyers, and legislators. The group that goes into the cities ought to go there with a sympathetic and understanding view of farming and country life. Two-thirds of the Nation's population is urban. They are in position to control in national life and legislation. It is of the utmost importance that the views of urban people be intelligent concerning the great industry of agriculture. They need the leavening knowledge that boys and girls who come from the country and whose eyes have been opened bring with them; whose hands have been

trained, whose sympathy has been expanded, and whose understanding has been broadened by 4-H club work.

We are now enrolling about 1 out of each 14 of the rural boys and girls in club work; holding them an average of nearly two years. We should be enrolling at least one in each six of this group every year.

This is the second big step immediately before us in club work -- increasing our staff that gives attention to club work, organizing and training our local leaders more effectively, and increasing our enrollments.

There is a question in some minds as to whether we should lay stress at this time on increased enrollment of present age groups or initiate work with older boys and girls, young men and women 20 to 26. Our own vote is for continuing to increase our membership in the present age group, 10 to 20. To take up special work with groups beyond 20, while inviting, is not, in our mind, as likely to give as large returns under present conditions as is working with boys and girls 12 to 18. It is not the immediate, pressing problem. We would, nevertheless, like to see States here and there, as a matter of research and experiment, enter the older-group field and work out for us the best method of entering that field, and this is what is actually happening in Kentucky, Minnesota, Connecticut, New Jersey, and other States where work with young men and young women beyond club age is being undertaken.

The thought I want to leave in your minds is: Let us continue to increase our membership in the age group from 10 to 20, keeping each member in the work as long as we can, giving the older members increasing tasks and responsibilities, and holding a sufficient number of them in club work long enough so that they may, in their later work, assume responsibility for younger groups as club leaders. If we do our work well with this younger group, we shall not have so much teaching to do when they grow older.

About 20 per cent of our club leaders now are older club members. Around 23 per cent are school-teachers, 20 per cent farmers, and 33 per cent farm or village women.

The probabilities are that we are not considering our club work in large enough terms. Roughly speaking, there is one boy or girl of club age on every farm. In an average county of 2,200 farms, there are 2,200 farm boys and girls and about 2,200 more boys and girls living in the villages of the same county, making around 4,400 boys and girls potential members of 4-H clubs. It is pretty plain--is it not?-- that a county agricultural agent, giving two-thirds of his time, as he does on the average, to adult work, can hardly do justice in a 4-H club way to 2,200 farm boys, giving only one-third of his time to them. Nor can the home demonstration agent, giving a third of her time to club work, adequately serve the needs of 2,200 rural girls.

The data gathered from many States show that we are not meeting this problem. We can begin to meet it only where we have more help in the county with boys' and girls' club work. Some States will furnish this help in one way and some in another; but the fact is we need more help in the counties to do the club work. In our mind, there are needed at least 2,000 more workers in this field, giving their whole time to club work, and that isn't the end, simply the next step. We have found something in club work that people want for their children, something they are willing to pay for, something they propose to have, and we should make our plans to give it to them.

There is another step in club work that needs to be taken and taken soon, and that is to reexamine our work in every State and with every club to see that each club is concerned with the living, vital problems of the farmer, farm home, and community. It helps the boy and the girl more, makes them more keen to do the job, if the project they are working on has a significance for the farm, the farm home, or the community in which it is carried on. It is not enough to do something just for exercise, or even just to learn how. We lose much if there is not a farm or home or community need behind each project. Club work is concerned with life's needs -- that is what has made it strong; that is why parents want it for their children.

In the studies made in West Virginia by Ella Gardner of the United States Children's Bureau, she found that around 62 per cent of the more than 900 4-H club children interviewed regarded the project as the most interesting part of the club work. Only 4 per cent thought the mechanics of organization most interesting. We, as administrators, need to see that the project work itself is magnified and such things as recreation, music, reporting, made to play their appropriate roles as supplementary to the projects. The club project, to be most valuable, should meet a real local need.

May I call your attention to one more matter, not of major significance but still of importance to the welfare of club work. Each year most of you are sending one or more leaders to the national club camp at Washington. We would like to encourage you, so far as practicable, to send the same leaders, men and women, each year. These leaders meet regularly in conference. It takes some time for these leaders to get acquainted with each other, have faith in each other, and learn how to do business together. Then, each newcomer to Washington wants to see Washington and wants to accompany the club members on all their trips. This makes it most difficult for the group, as a whole, to do much constructive thinking in a national way. In the best interests of club work, then, let me urge you to send, so far as practicable, the same leaders to Washington each year. We look to these leaders for constructive suggestions. Each year should build on the preceding year. This is difficult of accomplishment with a shifting group. Send us the same leaders every year.

In bringing this paper to a close, I would leave with you these few thoughts:

(1) As early as practicable, appoint a national committee, made up of interested college presidents, heads of agricultural-college teaching departments, extension directors, and club leaders, men and women, to appraise our present club work, redefine its objectives under the law, and point out its place in the national educational system and its right relationship to other educational groups. The Nation is entitled to such a statement from us.

(2) Take such steps as may be necessary to reach more rural boys and girls with the 4-H educational program. The Nation is looking to us for a statement of our needs. May we see club work in large enough terms.

(3) In our club work, may we magnify essentials. The project is the essential; but it is an essential only as it meets a local farm or home or community need. Although we have not touched upon it in our text, may we add in our conclusion that recreation is a vital rural need also, and should be a part of every club program.

(4) Send to the Washington 4-H club camp, whenever practicable, the same club leaders each year. Club work will receive greater constructive leadership by such a process.

Finally, may we all more fully realize the growing magnitude and significance of 4-H club work in the American system of education and give to it our closest attention and our best efforts.



